

Connect

supporting student participation

Number 184
August 2010

ABN: 98 174 663 341



Student Conferences:

Across two states

*Across **primary** and **secondary** schools*

*Across **time**: past, present and future*

+ *Student Participation in USA and Canada
Student views on education issues*

Student Councils:

- Who makes the decisions?
- Who does the work?

*An audit of
responsibilities in
Student Councils*

Connect

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Photos of *Frenzy* on cover and pages 3-4: **Trent Ray**
Photos of *VicSRC Congress* on cover and pages 12-14:
Rosa Coyle-Hayward

Why does *Connect* exist?

Connect has been
published bi-monthly since 1979.

It aims to:

- document student participation approaches and initiatives;
- support reflective practices;
- develop and share resources.

Connect:

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This Issue:

Again, this issue highlights the work of Student Councils, through voices and writing from conferences held in Victoria and New South Wales.



Primary and secondary school students write here about their experiences and about the issues that matter to them. Firstly, from the *Frenzy* day for primary school JSCs, some students and their teacher reflect on the day and on the operation of their own Junior School Council.

Then the *VicSRC State Congress* – the 5th in recent times – provides the opportunity for us to catch a glimpse of the development of Student Councils. A document from the *Connect* archives (which I think was included with an issue in 1986, but never actually printed in *Connect*) provides something of a 'base line' for comparisons with some brief stories of current SRCs. Then these form the backdrop against which students at the VicSRC Congress started 'dreaming' in groups about what SRCs **could** be. These groups, in a very short time, were challenged to discuss and then make a quick poster of what they'd expect or hope to see in 2020.

There's also a report from students about the VicSRC Congress and another report about the *NSW State SRC Conference* that was held at about the same time.

Finally, *Parents Victoria* asked students at the VicSRC Congress for their views on a range of current issues, and some of their responses are included here.

But we also need to become **critical** about the state of Student Councils. They're supposed to be bodies run by students for students. **Are they?** Who finishes up doing the work and making the decisions? An *audit tool* for Student Councils is included here for you to start some conversations about **your** Student Council.

And both Adam Fletcher and Kathleen Cushman provide some comparative information about student participation and student voices in the USA and Canada.

Double issue next

The next two issues of *Connect* will be amalgamated as a larger **double issue** (#185-186) in **November**. The **deadline** for that issue will be the **end of October**. That will have the benefit of also avoiding the rush to publish and distribute an issue before schools close for Christmas.

Make sure you contribute your stories to *Connect*. The extra size will mean you can 'stretch out' and explore some issues at greater length. Until then ...

Roger Holdsworth

Next: Double Issue: #185-186: November 2010
Deadline for material: end of October, 2010

Frenzy!

On Thursday 3rd of June, 2010 we had the privilege of attending the JSC Congress held as part of *Frenzy* at the Box Hill Town Hall.

Before the day, we arranged a small meeting of 20 other Grade 5 students from Laburnum Primary School and asked them to complete a survey of their opinions about Climate Change. We collected all of their great ideas and took them with us to the Box Hill Town Hall where we participated in a heap of fun activities:

- a Fundraising Expo and training sessions;
- leadership workshops;
- issue-based discussions about the environment; and
- a parliamentary style Congress.

During the Congress, Sam and Finley represented Laburnum and spoke in front of 120 students from all over Victoria. They were asked to stand up in front of everyone and share the ideas and opinions that students from our school hold about Climate Change. These motions were voted on by all members of the Congress and some of these will now be taken to the Victorian State Government.



We had a fantastic day and feel so lucky to have had the opportunity to represent our school at the JSC Congress 2010. We can't wait to share our fantastic and exciting fundraising ideas at our next JSC meeting and to put our new leadership skills into practice.

Sam, Eliza, Finley, and David

JSC Representatives

Laburnum Primary School, Blackburn, Vic



Our Junior School Council

At Laburnum Primary School we are delighted to have a well established leadership program that provides many opportunities for students to take on additional responsibilities, have a voice within the school and develop their leadership skills.

The Junior School Council (JSC) is a student based committee run by students for students. The aim is to provide the student body at Laburnum with an open forum to communicate their thoughts and opinions, as well as provide students with opportunities to make a difference and connect with the community.

At the beginning of each school year, all classes from Prep to Grade 6 elect two students to represent their class. The role of each JSC Representative is to attend fortnightly meetings, exemplify leadership, team work, responsibility and develop partnerships with the wider community.

Ben, Imogen and Alicia

With 35 classes, our four School Captains play an integral role in this committee of over 70 student members. It is their responsibility to plan agendas, chair fortnightly meetings and publish minutes for all representatives and teachers to access and share. *In my opinion, we often underestimate just what children are capable of.* From a teacher's perspective it is inspiring to witness how students across all levels of the school have self established an extremely co-operative and supportive environment.

Throughout the year, the JSC is involved in the organisation of fundraising events where monies raised are distributed to community

organisations, charities or directed back to Laburnum Primary School to fund items identified as important by students. Along with fundraising, the JSC provides students with a forum to discuss important topics raised by students and assist with important decision-making processes where student input is vital.

This year alone the JSC has already raised over \$3000 for the ANZAC and Good Friday Appeals and the recent Pink Day where our school supported the Breast Cancer Network Australia and The Glen McGrath Foundation. This would not have been possible without the dedication and enthusiasm of the 2010 JSC Representatives and, of course, the support of teachers and parent community.

This term the JSC has also been heavily involved with concept designs for a new multi-aged playground that

will be located on the boundary of the athletics track that is due to be built over the coming months.

The JSC's work this year has only just begun! There are big plans for some exciting new student-led lunchtime activities and fundraisers in Terms 3 and 4, not to mention our JSC Footy Day and Disco!

Trent Ray

JSC Co-ordinator
Laburnum
Primary School,
Blackburn



Past, Presents & Future

The Second Victorian State Student Conference: 1986

We attended the **Second Victorian Student Conference** at the Institute of Educational Administration in Geelong from the **5th to the 7th October 1986**. The Conference's main objectives were to help students in their new decision making roles in education – not only this, but to join forces with students from the whole state of Victoria to discuss recommendations for the **6 key issues from the Ministerial Working Party papers, Volume 1**.

The attendance rate spanned from around 65-70 students from both Government and non-Government schools. Issues that were discussed were:

1. Why student participation?
2. Learning and decision making
3. Student participation and equity
4. Support for student participation
5. Representation and students on committees
6. Accreditation of student participation

Students also had the opportunity to participate and organise a video of the conference, involving the writing of the script, working cameras, and interviewing people. This was one of the workshops that were offered to students at the conference. Other workshops were:

- Girls Speak Up (Equal Opportunity)
- Bulletin (for the participants of the conference)
- Accreditation
- SRC
- Student Rights
- Regional Networks/Victorian State Student Network

Overall we felt that both the surroundings of the IEA and the staff were very helpful for us to contribute to our fullest. It was very worthwhile and a great learning experience for all who attended.

Jennifer Davies (Year 11, Hurstbridge High School)
Fiona Tyshing (Year 11, Hurstbridge High School)
Troy Hoffman (Year 8, Montmorency High School)
Andrew Dillon (Year 12, Northcote Tech School)

A State Student Network?

1. The participants, representatives of secondary students from both government and non-government sectors throughout the state, developed the concept of a State Student Network during the conference. They decided that the establishment of a State Student Network, representative and supportive of student participation and organisations at school and regional levels, was a necessity and requiring immediate action.
2. A working group felt it was inappropriate that purpose and function of any state student organisation be decided at this state conference. Rather, it felt that an interim group be set up to look at and support the establishment of a state student body that could represent the view of secondary students.
3. The State Student Conference would like to recommend that the Ministerial Working Party look at the possible formation of a State Student Organisation that can assist student involvement at a state-wide level.

Some Good Ideas

- Set up Working Parties with teachers and parents to work on educational issues ... Health and Human Relations, planning for the VCE Curriculum, Equal Opportunity etc.
- Hold forums for students at Year Levels.
- Set up a student/SRC Newsletter.
- Get **ACTION** started and **SEE IT THROUGH** to the end!
- Have a voice in the school newsletter.
- Hold joint meetings with other SRCs from neighbouring schools.
- **COMMUNICATE** to all students.
- Get **ENTHUSIASM** going!!

Six Key Issues ♦♦♦

What did we do?

Most of the time at the Conference was spent discussing 6 key issues about student participation. We did this so that students could have their say about these important issues and influence the Ministerial Working Party on Student Participation.

Issue 1: Why Student Participation?

We tried to figure out why student participation was important...

- It's a student right to have a say.
- If you learn to participate in school you can start participating in a wide range of activities after school - things that affect your life.
- Participation is a learning experience.
- Participation develops an appreciation of learning and a commitment to learning because participation is a learning experience.

Issue 2: Learning and Decision Making

This issue is related to students making decisions about what and how they learn, and making decisions in partnership with adults about whole school issues etc. How does making decisions help students learn?

- Subject choice alone is not student participation.
- Student participation is having input into what is taught, how it is taught, anything that is happening around the school. It also involves having responsibilities in what happens.
- Schools should provide for students' preferences, needs and wants.
- Student participation is learning by being involved in decision making.

If student participation in decision making structures beyond the classroom is also regarded as a form of learning, how should it be recognised?

- In many cases there is no recognition.
- It should be recognised by being part of a student course.
- A descriptive assessment of exactly what students have achieved should be written.
- Student participation beyond the classroom should be goal based and not competitive.
- Participations in SRCs, committees etc should be a subject in its own right.

What curriculum practices promote links between learning and decision making?

- Negotiated curriculum and goal based assessment, and accreditation of student participation.
- External curriculum and assessment arrangements eg HSC Group 1, limit student participation in decision-making both within and beyond the classroom.
- Courses like STC are better in promoting links between learning and decision-making.
- Courses like STC have more connection with the world outside of school and students get more community awareness.

Issue 3: Student Participation and Equity

Equity means equal opportunities, equal rights and equal responsibilities for everyone. Does student participation allow for **everyone** to have a say?

- HSC is not fair. You can study all year and fail an exam. Both students and teachers have little say in what is learned. The only way to have equal learning chances is by negotiating.
- The process of learning is important. Learning should be non-competitive so that you are only judged on your own ability; smaller classes would help with negotiation and discussion; exams are unfair; teachers shouldn't stereotype students into good (bright) kids and slow kids.

Issue 4: Support for Student Participation

This issue is about getting more support for student participation. What are the best types of support?

- Student representatives should be provided with glossaries so the jargon can be understood by them.
- Papers should be simplified so students can understand.
- Teachers should have time release so they have the time to support students.

Issue 5: Representation and Students on Committees

This issue is about the problems students have being representatives on committees. How can we make it better?

- Bodies such as curriculum committees make it hard for students to participate.
- Teachers often talk amongst themselves and do deals outside of the meetings, thus leaving students left out.
- Parents and students are often not included or are frozen out by jargon, tactics, procedures, attitudes and tokenism.
- Often students have little or no knowledge of issues in curriculum or timetabling.
- Few students actively participate in such meetings.

Issue 6: Accreditation of Student Participation

How can students get proper recognition and credit for the work they do making decisions?

- Schools should develop a 'democracy skills' policy. This policy should involve making democratic processes a part of every subject of the curriculum, and should be accredited in the form of an aspect of school reports which includes a statement of that school's policy and the skills and learning it develops. 'Democracy Skills' as such would not be an independent subject but a broad, overlapping practice of educating.
- The education system needs to change its emphasis from competitive learning to helping each student reach attainable goals.

Past, *Present* & Future

Congress 5: Fifth VicSRC State Congress: 2010

At the recent VicSRC statewide conference: Congress 5 (August 6-7, 2010), Connect invited student representatives to provide a short profile of their Student Council. These were written early in the Congress (and reflections may have changed because of later discussions), but the following five descriptions give us a small cross-section of some current practices.

Narre Warren South P-12 College: Student Voice P-12

Student Voice gives the student body a voice at our College and allows young leaders to make productive change in their school environment. It encourages students to stand up for what they believe in and to promote a healthy change.

Narre Warren South is a Prep to Year 12 College, so it is imperative that all faculties of the school are represented and given equal opportunities to achieve the best from and for our school. We have two captains and two leaders from each year level, starting at Year 5. To join **Student Voice**, students are given an application form and then have an interview with coordinators and with previous members of **Student Voice** (the Year 12s from previous years).

Student Voice meets every second week at lunchtime. We discuss anything and everything that affects the school and that is brought to our attention.

Our biggest recent achievement – and this is ongoing – is to promote multiculturalism and cultural diversity in the College. The College has one of the largest Afghani populations in Victoria and **Student Voice** works exceptionally hard to promote this cultural diversity. So far we have organised a multicultural day and ceremony, as well as several other events concerning culture.

Student Voice is strongly supported at the school, which often includes us in making decisions for the school. This can include school uniforms, Year 12 jumpers etc, as well as fundraising. Similarly, because students experience the results of **Student Voice's** work, they appreciate the changes we make and strive to make the school better.

Although our **Student Voice** is not perfect, its members work exceptionally hard as a team to achieve results. The future looks very bright!

Skye Wylde

Bellarine Secondary College: Student Government

At Bellarine Secondary College we have **Student Government** so that students have the chance to have a say in their school, their learning and their future.

Student Government is mostly run by older students who train younger students so that they know what they are doing by the time they move up the school. Students join **Student Government** if they are elected by their peers and teachers, or if they show initiative. We meet about once a week, but if we are working on a school project, we can meet more regularly.

In **Student Government**, we decide on policies to do with classroom behaviour, bullying, graffiti and so on, as well as organising fundraisers and other functions. Our biggest achievements have recently been a youth festival and organising a student radio. We're always bringing forward ideas to decide on and we report back to students through the student bulletin, the newsletter, at assemblies and through word of mouth.

Our **Student Government** is like a big family. We look out for the wellbeing of others in the school and **Student Government** itself. We meet regularly and are a bright happy bunch of kids.

Kate Preston



Box Hill Senior Secondary College: School Leadership Team

Our team exists so that students can have a say about how the school runs, and so we can give back to the community through fundraising.

The Year 12s run the *School Leadership Team* meetings and deal with Year 12 issues. The Year 11 students work on Year 11 issues and plan events for their year. These student representatives are nominated and then chosen based on GPA.

We meet every week or so on a Wednesday during Mentor (home group) time or lunchtime. We have organised recycling campaigns and planned events. Our biggest recent achievement has been getting recycling bins around the school.

The *School Leadership Team* values input from students from all year levels and encourages views and suggestions from all. We then report back to students during year level assemblies.

Kimberley Page

Pembroke Secondary College: Student Representative Council

We have an *SRC* at Pembroke Secondary College because it is the voice of our students, and it enables us to get things done like organising fundraisers and money for causes. It helps make the school a better place.

People join the *SRC* by turning up at our first meeting. It is made up of people who want to be in it, instead of being a popularity contest. We meet every week at Tuesday lunchtime.

The *SRC* provides a voice for students by putting their ideas out there and helping the school.

Perin and Mitchell

Antonine College: Student Leaders

Student Leaders exist to have an input to our future. We can't always stand back and allow others to make the decisions for us. We can have a say.

We have two School Captains, two Sport Captains and a Social Justice Leader. They work closely with the Principal and the Vice-Principal. Then come Year 12 House Leaders and, for all year levels to be heard, we have four representatives from each year level as well. Overall, our student council is quite big, but everyone gets a responsibility.

To be a *Student Leader*, you have to nominate yourself and get two nominations from the students. You fill out a form with an essay on why you want to be a Leader and what you hope to achieve. Then the Vice-Principal/Director of Studies carries out interviews, and from there, the Leaders are chosen.

The Director of Studies usually calls the meeting. We meet before assemblies, when a huge event is coming up, like the sports carnival. Most of the time not everyone meets up, but only those needed explicitly for the events.

The *Student Leaders* run the assemblies (including prayers and introducing the teachers), sports carnivals, house sports and trivia. We fundraise for charities as well. Most Leaders attend functions for leaders in Victoria (for example, the VicSRC Congress). Our Senior Leaders also help out at the primary school campus. Our school is relatively new, so our biggest achievement so far has been running our first leadership camp to train our Student Leaders.

If we have something to say, we go directly to a teacher or the Director of Studies, and if they see it as valuable, they'll take it higher. If a decision is put through or rejected, that might take a while to report back to students, and sometimes we have to ask.

Our *Student Leaders* are new – and we still have room to improve.

Lauraine, Lekhna and Rim



Past, Present & Future

The state of Student Representative Councils in 2020

Also at the VicSRC Congress in August, representatives (working in inter-school groups) were asked to imagine and design new and powerful Student Councils for the future - for 2020. Their posters were imaginative and graphic and these transcribed words can convey only part of their dreams.

SRC HQ Blimp:

*Where dreams become reality ...
where everyone is family ...*

A Global SRC Community - where students can interact and discuss issues that are affecting them: healthier canteens; no bullying; respect; spreading the love; happy students; communication.

There would be lots of student representatives with more training for students to build personal skills eg leadership skills. They would have more knowledge about SRCs and what's going on around the area, more programs like these, more fundraising but also more money supplied. We would have greater knowledge. It would all be bigger and more exciting, with overseas trips and we would be organising our own camps.

Our 2020 SRC

The SRC will have the power to hold referendums which, if voted in, the school must adopt! There will be mandatory involvement of Principals and staff in the SRC and co-curricular activities.

The SRC will have a say on discipline: on how other students are treated.

We will have the power to use students' choices on issues etc. There will be modern advice about real situations: not against drugs, but how to use them safely; there will be presentations and speeches about home and health issues. The SRC will change canteens and access to fatty foods: to make sure we have healthy foods and healthy minds. The school will be environmentally friendly and aware of how many black balloons we have used - our impact on global warming.

There will be more accessible student facilities and more student choice of library stock.

We will be paid to be on the SRC and the SRC will be a subject so we wouldn't have to give up lunches and extra time. There will be competitions for effectiveness in SRCs.

We will have international connections and overseas exchanges, with a United Nations SRC and SRCs represented in every country.

The Spearmintsssss...



VicSRC 2020:

More recognition for the fact that we exist!

We will have more of a say in our own curriculum - about what we're learning. There will be regular reviews and petitions within the school and within the SRC itself.

The SRC will have actual influence: it will be taken seriously, have influence on the younger generation and do more than just fundraising. It will have more community involvement on issues like recycling and rubbish.



There will be open discussions between students and teachers with regular and frequent meetings of the SRC. Perhaps there will be an SRC executive or perhaps a teacher and executive panel. It will have more funding for supplies and resources.

The SRC will have more freedom.

2020 SRC Power

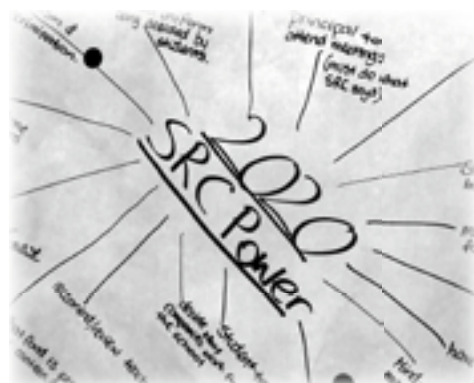
In 2020, the SRC will be popular. Students will decide how the money is spent. The Principal will attend meetings – and must do what the SRC says.

There will be an upgrade of buildings and facilities, which will include a students-only area of the school. There will be more programs for kids. The SRC will determine what food is served at the canteen, and its prices. It will decide what companies work for the school.

Students will have a say in the curriculum. Exams will be done on laptops. The SRC will be a subject.

The SRC will recommend on and review teachers, fix racism and discrimination, and enable students to decide on school uniform.

Student transport will be provided, with *myki* for students only.



Orange Group

Magic SRCs

The SRC will have greater input and more say over many things: school facilities such as rooms and grounds; better learning facilities; be able to assist organising major events such as athletics and swimming carnivals, and more control over student activities. It will have the power to decide things.

There will be greater student involvement, and more regular SRC meetings. The SRC will have much more respect; the face of the SRC will be better recognised – we could have blazers for recognition or superhero costumes!

There will be better communication between teachers and students and time allocated for this through assemblies and the bulletin or newsletter. There will be more teacher support and Government sponsorship.

Dark Blue Group



Power:

Voices heard ... Ideas supported!

Students will have a body from across Victoria representing SRCs in Parliament with a member for SRCs. We will have voting power and be able to vote for school policies.

We will have an SRC building and our own newspaper and advertise about SRCs. We will get international help and have student exchange programs.

Schools will be eco-friendly and have after-school activities. There will be big events organised by meetings of SRC members. The SRC will have a budget and be involved on the uniform committee. We will have power to identify the good and bad teachers.

In 2020, schools will have beds for sleeping class, we will go to school in hovercrafts, have a space school program with students in space, encourage school pets and cheerleaders and eat healthy chocolate.

School X:

No limits!

The Student Council will have power and be a core part of the school. Students will recognise their SRC: everyone at the school knows who their Student Council is and are proud of it. It gets respect from teachers and parents.

All students will be involved in decision making, including having a say in hiring teachers and getting involved in important points of curriculum. Because of this, we will have an understanding of exactly why we come to school. The Student Council will be the top of the hierarchy above the Principal.

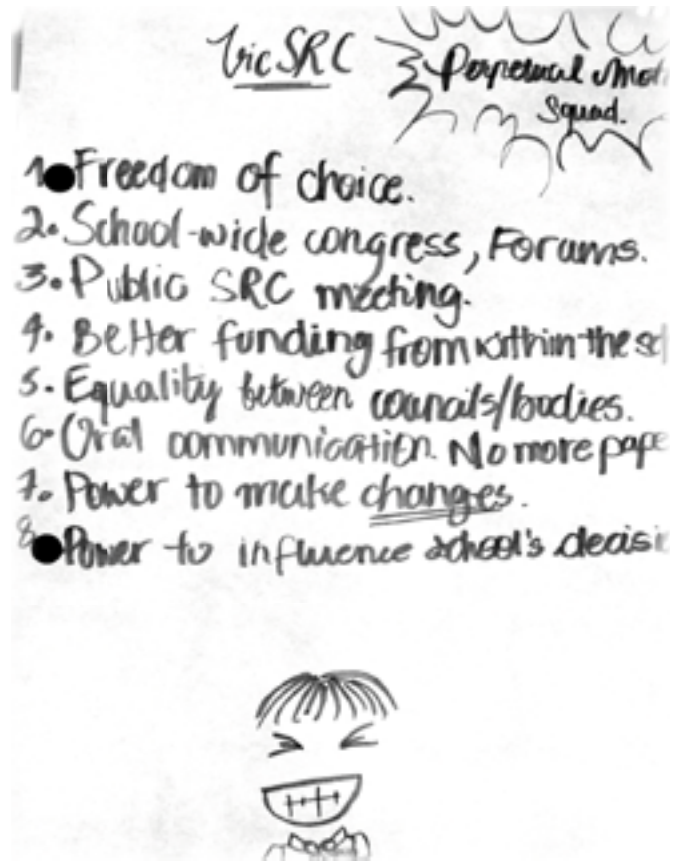
There will be a flashy SRC-dedicated page for computer screens (or TV screens), which can be used for advertisements or latest films. The SRC will have a dedicated office. There will be productions between SRCs from different schools.

The school will have a strong literacy program, and awesome sports centre with a pool, a huge library, actual working heaters and air conditioners, spaces to hang out in (with bean bags), cyber learning areas (with free internet) and areas dedicated to silence, a pet zoo, more freedom - and daily concerts. There will be no restrictions on campus food (with buffet lunches), a kitchen with water dispenser, a night club on campus, carnival rides and transformer bodyguards. At the same time, the school will be environmentally friendly, carbon neutral and have a vegetable patch.

There will be millions of camps available, including a band camp and a Student Council camp out of Australia (eg in New Zealand, Bali or Europe).

There will be a different coloured uniform – or perhaps no uniform at all. Everyone will know each other well – and have telepathic powers.

Pink Group



In 2020 there will be ...

- freedom of choice;
- school-wide congresses and forums;
- public SRC meetings;
- better funding from within the school for SRCs;
- equality between SRCs and other bodies;
- oral communication with students: no more papers!;
- students having the power to make changes; and
- SRC having the power to influence the school's decisions.

Perpetual Motion Squad

SRC 2020: Ohh, I Get It!

Our six big ideas for 2020 are:

- teacher review by students;
- student input on spending (eg on facilities): "Vote for us if you want a dollar";
- SRC recognition;
- effective decision-making processes;
- an adequate cross-section of year levels in the SRC;
- the Principal equal with the SRC.

The key is **communication** with everyone's views heard eg speaking up; "I'm making a change" – through a suggestion box.

Purple People Eaters

Congress 5!

On the 5th of August 2010, members of the outgoing VicSRC Executive met up at Flinders Street station and departed for the Oasis campsite, prepared for the next two days to be tough, challenging, productive and, most of all, exciting!

Once we had arrived at the campsite it was straight into the work, preparing congress 'passports', show bags and name-tags. Alongside the Executive were also many crew and a few Congress members who had come up early, giving us a hand to get the work done.

Even after a late night on Thursday, our spirits could not be dampened! As people started arriving for registration early, the atmosphere started to grow and only grew as more and more people started flooding in. Congress members headed downstairs to the gymnasium to find stalls set up by different organisations that they could find out about and participate in activities around that stall. Some of the organisations included Parents Victoria, **Connect**, Second Strike, YACVic, the State Schools Relief, VISTA, RUMAD and of course the VicSRC. We then got into our colour groups and got to know each other a bit better.

Before we knew it, we were right into workshop topics in areas such as SRC training, student involvement, SRC recognition, leadership, funding, planning

events and primary school links. After working on proposed motions, we had a lunch break and then set off straight into our first sitting of Congress. There were many great motions passed that will be very exciting for the new Executive to work on. Some of the motions asked the Executive to create an online forum for SRCs to communicate and share ideas, to work towards having more 'leadership workshops' available for students, to create a video that will promote student involvement and to make a 'how to' kit for event planning - and getting approval for such events.

As always, great fun was had on Friday night with the whole Congress participating in colour group activities. With limbo, trivia, singing and cheering all on the table, a great competitive spirit was flying around the room, with colours soaring high; teamwork and enthusiasm were definitely two things that were not lacking at all! After the fun and games of colour group competitions we could choose between a disco, campfire or guitar hero to entertain ourselves.

On Saturday morning we were off to a bright start, with spirits high and people ready to get stuck into their next workshop topic: bullying, canteen, vandalism, climate change, wellbeing, drugs and alcohol, and environment. Once again, the formal Congress was most exciting with some fantastic resolutions being passed: providing case studies of how to deal with bullying; making schools more aware of the government subsidies for being environmentally friendly; and having more power/being able to give constructive criticism to our teachers.

Overall Congress 5 was absolutely fantastic and very productive.

Tiffany Chapman

Toorak College & VicSRC Executive

Here are some comments from student participants:

"The workshops were really interesting and the ideas created were quite inventive. Everything was overwhelming at first but then I started talking to people from other schools and started feeling a little bit more confident, and by the end I was the most confident I've been. My first Congress sitting was different, in the best of ways; all of the motions raised good question and debates between opposing sides. It was a really well structured event and everything went off without a hitch. The Executive members made it a really amazing Congress. I must say that it was one of the most fun experiences I've had."

Samantha Chapman

Year 7, Casey Grammar School
(first time Congress participant)

"Congress 5 was an extraordinary, eye opening experience."

Along with 90 other students from across Victoria, I was offered the opportunity to voice my opinions, as well as discuss important issues that affect us all as students on a daily basis. I was honoured to represent my school as well as the VicSRC Executive."



The VicSRC receives funding support from the **Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development** and is auspiced by and based at the **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)**. It can be reached there on 03 9267 3744 or, for the cost of a local call from outside Melbourne on 1300 727 176; or by email: vicsrc@yacvic.org.au

www.vicsrc.org.au



We all participated in a formal Congress where motions and important issues were debated and amended. Ultimately all the successful motions that were passed will become our portfolios for the following VicSRC year.

The event was full of stimulating workshops, interactive activities, a nail-biting election and delicious treats as well as a competitive colour group competition (which my team, the Purple People Eaters, won!).

Congress 5 was such an amazing opportunity. I met so many other passionate and ambitious students who I know will achieve greatness for their school SRCs. I highly recommend that if you were given the chance to attend the VicSRC Congress, you should jump at the opportunity and make the most of it."

Elizabeth Kalas

Year 11, Taylors Lakes Secondary College

"The VicSRC Congress 5 cannot be described in simple adjectives alone. It was practically a hurricane. A whirlwind of ideas, ingenuity and creativity virtually plummeted into my brain as 90 young leaders from across Victoria blew up a storm in heated Congress debates and small team (but big brained) activities.

The Congress was a huge awakening for me. As a Year 12 student, my time as SRC President at my own school is quickly drawing to a close – in a matter of weeks. And I realised as I watched the middle and junior years students debate and facilitate discussion, that the need for an overall body such as the VicSRC is integral, and the call for student voices to be heard is still roaring louder than ever.

Funnily enough, it is not only high school students that feel as if their voices are being lost within a tunnel of

bureaucracy and school regulations, as primary school students are feeling the plug too! In a small group discussion we recognised that, in order to create successful and mature leaders in high school, we must encourage opportunities for leadership and independence throughout primary school. And although the discussion only developed into the (excuse the pun) infant stages, I urge all high schools to consider such a proposition with their local primary schools or main feeder schools, as the qualities of leadership skills are desired in all walks of life.

I shuffled into the Congress, as a 'mediocre' SRC President – and I believe that I actually sauntered out of Congress, quite possibly a 'not-so-special' SRC President, but a President with a plethora of fresh ideas – and someone who felt as if they were inspired again."

Lou Mapleston

Year 12, Mentone Girls' Secondary College



VicSRC Awards

The VicSRC announced the winners of the 2010 SRC awards at Congress 5:

Connect Award for Integration: *recognising SRCs that are strongly connected to the school's decision-making processes, that are strongly responsive to student needs and voices, and that are linked strongly with the School Council/Board and its committees:*

Winner: The University High School
Runner up: Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Finalist: Caroline Chisholm Catholic College

Second Strike Award for Enterprise: *recognising SRCs that, through use of strategic planning and strong leadership structure, have completed a highly successful school or community project:*

Winner: Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Runner up: Braybrook College
Finalist: Mentone Girls Secondary College

VASSP Award for Informed Representation: *recognising SRCs that are truly democratic and fully representative of students:*

Winner: Nossal High School
Runner up: Galvin Park Secondary College
Finalist: Ivanhoe Grammar School, Plenty Campus



New VicSRC Executive Elected

Students at Congress 5 elected the new VicSRC Student Executive for 2010-2011:

Kosheni Arulsothy, Melbourne Girl's College (Year 11)
Samantha Chapman, Casey Grammar School (Year 7)
Tiffany Chapman, Toorak College (Year 9)
Jenesse Cruz, Caroline Chisholm Catholic College (Year 11)
Tim Eric, Frankston High School (Year 10)
Catherine Gilford, Mentone Girls Grammar School (Year 11)
Marlee-Alice Gorman, Princes Hill Secondary College (Year 8)
Elizabeth Kalas, Taylors Lakes Secondary College (Year 11)
Trent Knight, Narre Warren South P-12 College (Year 8)
Chloe Lazzaro, Princes Hill Secondary College (Year 10)
Robert Liang, Blackburn High School (Year 11)
Ellie Patterson, Melbourne Girl's College (Year 9)
Kimi Pellosis, Frankston High School (Year 11)
Kate Preston, Bellarine Secondary College (Year 10)
Megan Shellie, Mentone Girls Grammar School (Year 11)



VicSRC Regional SRC Conferences

Friday 27th August

Leongatha Secondary College
(South Gippsland Regional Conference)

Monday 30th August

Trafalgar Secondary College
(La Trobe Valley Regional Conference)

Wednesday 1st September

Bendigo Senior Secondary College
(Bendigo Regional Conference)

Friday 10th September

Brauer College, Warrnambool
(Warrnambool Regional Conference)

Monday 13th September

Heywood District Secondary College
(South West Regional Conference)

Tuesday 14th September

Bairnsdale Secondary College
(East Gippsland Regional Conference)

Time:	9.45am-2.15pm
Cost:	\$15 VicSRC Members; \$20 Non-VicSRC Members
Register:	Contact VicSRC: 9267 3744



Parents survey student views on current issues

At the start of the recent VicSRC Congress, **Parents Victoria** asked students for their views on some current educational issues. The following is a cross-section of the responses.

Food Services in Schools

As schools get modernised, what do you see schools could provide or improve for students? Any suggestions? What works at your school?

"Modern facilities; machines they will use in the future."

"Cheaper food in our canteen and more options eg vegetarian options."

"I like the fact that we banned junk food."

"Better and healthier foods at schools."

"Organic produce."

"More cost effective and healthier food options; the ability to have access to fresh fruit etc."

"Continue to hold views on healthier eating. Also more areas for sitting and eating."

"Schools should provide only healthy options; they should not be able to have the alternative of 'junk' food."

"Healthy options and fair prices."

"Fresh cooked meals with lots of vegetables eg stirfries, lasagne, soup. Get rid of pies and hotdogs."

"More hot meals, not just fast food like pies and hotdogs."

Learning Spaces *for students to learn in comfortable environments. What is needed for this to happen?*

"Decent chairs."

"Tables to be the right height. Better heating and air con."

"Half of our tables are too short for senior students. And curtains so we can actually see PowerPoint learning."

"Ditch the conventional table and chair setup. Beanbags anyone? (Seriously.)"

"Heaters and air con that actually works. Teachers who can communicate effectively, and who aren't lazy. Undamaged classrooms, chairs, tables, windows."

"Up-to-date facilities and a high level of cleanliness, but also a warm and friendly atmosphere."

"Allow students better access to all facilities, more study areas with access to computers."

"Allow students to use many of the facilities. Access after hours."

"Schools could provide more education on things that affect them everyday such as learning how to financially support themselves and sex education. Have clean rooms, variety of environments – indoor and outdoor, library etc."

"Classes that are not too full."

"Up-to-date equipment, cleanliness and space. A welcoming environment."

"Places where students have the ability to create noise, not to be distracted by it. More one on one for students to be closer to their peers."

"I'm not very happy with large classrooms as they are very noisy and have lots of distractions."

Student health & wellbeing

How should schools support students on site when they are experiencing problems or wanting to support others? What would work best for you?

"Some form of counseling."

"Deal with the problems right away instead of waiting until they worsen. Better funding for health and wellbeing programs."

"We've got wonderful school chaplains. Do all schools have them?"

"Implementing the State Schools Relief Program more effectively."

"School counselors and opportunities for open group discussions in a trusting environment."

"Privacy is a key issue, therefore through our student wellbeing coordinator."

"School counselors – peer support teachers."

"Have counselors available, peer support leaders. Have an anonymous suggestion box."

"School counselors and opportunities for group discussions."

"Someone I trust: someone with good student-teacher relationship. Someone who the students know, not someone who has been allocated as the nurse etc."

"I would want to talk to someone I trust, not a counselor. Confidentiality is the key."

Technology in Schools

What is your biggest frustration? What could you suggest governments should do to support students in using or accessing the technology if they don't have it at home?

"Computers and laptops are terrible."

"We rely too much on computers and photocopiers and don't know how to do book research. Calculators are used too much; leads to losing simple mathematical skills."

"Information needs to be more easily accessed for those who don't have a computer or internet

– need to re-learn book research."

"Slow school portal! Hopefully the ultranet will do better."

"Computers that actually work! Having access to computers at lunch and recess for study etc."

"Students should be able to borrow laptops from the school or have access to computer labs after school hours. My biggest frustration is that the wireless at our school is very unreliable."

"Internet filtration makes it incredibly difficult to find appropriate well-resourced information."

"Students who do not have access to a computer away from school need to be able to gain access frequently."

"Opening hours at school library to extend; loans from school."

"Allow students to borrow things from school."

"Allow them to borrow the technology they need. My biggest frustration is that our school doesn't have proper wireless internet."

"Our school has laptops for every student. The only issue is the internet is not fast enough and people not using it responsibly."

"Our school recently got laptops for every student and they are mainly a distraction rather than help. They are used for games and movies rather than work."

Cost of schooling

What impacts on you or your family the most when paying for anything related to school? Are there specific costs you wish to question or want to bring to our attention?

"Book prices are overwhelming."

"Text books and stationery is really expensive. Printing costs are too general at school for people who do art subjects eg studio – leads to print more and have to pay more."

"School books, text books and stationery are sometimes hard to get and printing/computing costs – there is a general amount for all students, but seniors use more with their subjects – we have to pay even more."

"I tend to pay hundreds for sport (\$10 per day)."

"Laptop programs."

"School books and uniform."

"I have gone to my school since the beginning so I don't know what I would have had if my parents didn't have to pay school fees."

"Additional SRC involvement and study seminars proceeding into Year 12!"

"We had to prioritise paying the school fees which meant giving up some of the stuff we had before. There are no specific costs."

"We have no uniform so paying for enough clothes to wear is an issue for some people."

"As we have no uniform we must pay for clothes, which can be expensive."



National Testing & School Reports

What is your view on this topic as a student?

"I think it is useful."

"The new grading rates – one person has to fail – but I don't see why."

"The grading is frustrating and hard to understand and those who don't do well on the 'bell curve' end up failing."

"Ditch the letter grading! And C average is annoying."

"I think it's good but results should not be put on website – that is wrong!"

"I don't believe NAPLAN results alone can demonstrate your school's prowess, but I do believe school reports are a valuable insight to your progress."

"The national testing system seems irrelevant; the stress is placed on students for results/reflections for their teachers, however the testing does produce informative results."

"School reports need to hold the teacher's views more than they are. Teachers need to be honest."

"It's a great practice for exams and a great way for students to question their study timetables and ability to write."

"VELS system's great."

"I don't think we have enough tests at our school; they motivate me to learn. I like reports, however I believe national tests to be an inadequate view of your skills."

"I hate being compared to everyone else across Australia."

"I hate National Testing! It's wrong to compare one individual with another."

Violence in Schools

What annoys you the most on how schools manage problems in schools? Any suggestions as to how it could be handled differently from a student's perspective?

"They don't deal with it correctly. No justice. Call police."

"Teachers need to be better trained on how to deal better with student problems and better situations."

"Teachers need training on how to reduce the impact between groups so it doesn't end up escalating."

"Some schools turn a blind eye."

"Bully buster program in schools in Year 7."

"People who are violent do not get punished! They get off for injuring another student – it's not right."

"Violence is not a problem in our school fortunately, but when it occurs it is dealt with rather well."

"A more important approach where bullying is actually dealt with."

"Suspensions and punishment without counseling."

"Students should be educated about violence and such."

"The few times violence has been displayed it has been dealt with well."

"Programs for kids eg anger management, bullying. Investigation of why bullies do what they do."

"More productive programs need to be run. Preventing these things are better than punishing people for them."

Hygiene

What do students want or believe needs to change for better health in students and teachers?

"Soap in toilets would be nice."

"Bathrooms need updating; lockers need cleaning; tables and chairs need to be cleaned regularly."

"The toilets need updating/fixing as half the time there isn't any soap; classrooms need fixing too as some have mould."

"Compulsory campaign for sanitation (hand washing etc)?"

"Fix toilet facilities."

"Better and cleaner toilets, clean canteens and drink taps."

"Clean classrooms and good quality canteen food."

"I believe the hygiene issue is well tackled."

"Better rubbish policy to increase cleanliness of school grounds."

"Sanitisers and bins to be placed in more areas of school: Canteen, common rooms, hallways etc."

"Toilets cleaned regularly; cleaning/hygiene facilities be available at all times to students."

"Cleaner facilities and opportunities for students to take cleaning into their own hands."

"Toilets that work; rubbish littered everywhere."

"Need toilets that work and don't leak. Rubbish is also a huge problem."

Professional Learning for Teachers

What do you believe is a good teacher and what skill or skill set do they require most when teaching secondary students?

"Can connect with students."

"Being able to adapt to many different student needs. Being able to hold their own. Need to know how to control a class and each different child eg autistic – special needs. Need to be understanding without stepping over the teacher friendship boundary."

"Being able to adapt to different students and student needs; being able to hold their own – not just walking out when frustrated; need to be understanding without stepping over the line."

"Down to earth, good listener, willing to take his/her time off to help students."

"Teachers that actually know what they are teaching; teachers that don't get their work from google; and teachers that actually want to help you learn."

"A good teacher needs to be enthusiastic and an expert in their field as well as have a true love for their subject and be able to relate to their students."

"A good teacher is approachable, friendly and informative within their subject. Is also willing to partake in further tutoring of students etc."

"A teacher who connects with the students and is enthusiastic. A sense of humour, but firm in discipline, authoritative, and have knowledge of their subject."

"Their ability to understand the way a student learns and ways they can benefit."

"Teachers with a great relationship with students; patience; should not put down students."

"Ability to interact and listen. Fair and capable. Good at explaining."

"Need to understand students, and know what they're teaching. Good teacher-student relationships and being able to trust your teacher."

"They need to know how each individual student learns best."

Driver Education

Lots of media attention on this topic; what are your thoughts?

"School make days off for it."

"If professional driving lessons were cheaper, more people would be likely to take them, making better drivers."

"If we had professional driving lessons cheapened a little, then more people would be able to drive properly, reducing the teen crash rate, because then it would be affordable to students who work part-time."

"The school has regular assemblies, discussions etc for driver education, usually regarding safety and self awareness."

"Yes, there is heaps of media attention."

"Yes, it should be implemented in schools. It is almost impossible to afford to pay for driving."

"Driver education should certainly be integrated into the curriculum."

"Installing a program of Driver Education at all state schools."

"Needs to be reinforced throughout the year from Year 7 upwards."

"Important: teach road safety."

"I believe there should be opportunities to be taught road skills at school."

"I love it. It's really informative, and scare tactics (visits from prisoners) work really well."

"It's great. It makes kids aware that things can happen to them in a few years. It makes them aware that they're not invincible."

Contact: Gail McHardy, Parents Victoria



Accept, Engage, Time for Change

130 senior school leaders from across NSW recently gathered in Sydney's north-west to strengthen their leadership skills and discuss ways to encourage their peers to have a voice on issues that affect them.



The **2010 NSW State Student Representative Council Conference** took place during Education Week from Tuesday 3rd to Friday 6th August at Vision Valley Conference Centre, Arcadia, Sydney.

Director-General of the NSW Department of Education and Training, Michael Coutts-Trotter opened the conference. Mr Coutts-Trotter said the State Student Representative Council Conference has, for 24 years, encouraged student leaders to make a difference in their schools.

"I am very proud of the public school system in NSW, the values it teaches and the student leaders who are working to strengthen our schools," Mr Coutts-Trotter said. "As elected representatives of their school, Student Representative Council members must take into account everyone's views and be a link between students, the principal, teachers and the wider community."

"Since the first conference was held, over 3,000 secondary students have benefited from this unique opportunity to enhance their leadership skills."

"The conference was run by 20 outstanding young students who make up

the **SRC Conference Action Team**. These incredible young people are the leaders of the future and have worked tirelessly to plan and execute this annual event," he said.

Over 130 student leaders from secondary schools across NSW, including nine Aboriginal student leaders, elected by their peers at inter-school and regional Student Representative Council meetings, participated in this year's conference.

Following the conference, the student leaders will take the new ideas and information back to their school communities and put them to use for the benefit of all students.



The conference theme: **Accept, Engage, Time for Change** encourages students and Student Representative Councils to:

- promote acceptance and respect within the school community
- include a student voice in educational decision-making processes
- provide opportunities for all students to get involved in school life
- build school pride
- make schools places where students want to be.

Enviro Inspiro! 2010

The NSW SRC invited student teams from NSW public schools to create a five minute DVD and a two page report to showcase successful student-led environmental projects.

Student teams were able to win one of three major school 'prizes' valued up to \$3,000. The competition is a great way for students to engage with their local community in meaningful learning experiences to improve the environment.

The three winning entries were shown at the State SRC Conference.

Congratulations to the winners of **Enviro Inspiro! 2010:**

- 1st prize (\$3,000): Mudgee High School: **Hakea Hedge**
- 2nd prize (\$2,000): North Sydney Girls High School: **A Biodegradable Truth**
- 3rd prize (\$1,000): Warrawong Intensive English Centre: **New Beginnings**

High commendations:

- Lambton High School: **Spreading the Environmental Message**
- North Sydney Boys High School: **North Sydney Boys and Lane Cove West Liaison**
- Riverside Girls High School: **Back to Your Roots**
- Mosman High School: **Recyclone!**
- Ku-ring-gai High School: **Veggie Garden**
- Homebush Boys High School: **Enviro Mafia!**
- St George Girls High School: **Plant a Seed, Grow a Tree**
- Seven Hills High School: **Project Paper.**



Student and teacher responsibilities: An Audit for Student Councils

Who has responsibility for action within your Student Council? Who does the work and who makes the decisions?

The roles that students and teachers play in a Student Council can vary from time to time, but also can be seen differently by different people. This Audit Tool has been developed to start the discussion between student representatives and support teachers about who is doing what and who has what responsibility. This discussion can lead to greater opportunities for student leadership and ownership of their own organisation.

The Audit can be done at any time once students and teachers have settled into their roles. Ideally it would be undertaken as part of the Student Council's half year evaluation.

Ask students on the Student Council and the teachers who support the Council to complete the simple quiz by circling the scores that they think are closest to the way that the Student Council **actually** operates (not how you think it *should* operate). Tally up (and average) the scores and enter these in the table (next page). Present the results to a Student Council meeting for discussion; then write in some possible actions based on that discussion.

<i>Who exercises leadership in the following areas?</i>	<i>Teachers only</i>	<i>Mainly teachers with some student input</i>	<i>Teachers and students together</i>	<i>Mainly students with some teacher input</i>	<i>Students only</i>
a. Organising Student Council meetings: setting date, time, place etc	1	2	3	4	5
b. Setting the Student Council agenda: deciding what is to be discussed	1	2	3	4	5
c. Chairing the Student Council meeting	1	2	3	4	5
d. Taking minutes and recording decisions of the Student Council meetings	1	2	3	4	5
e. Providing background information to the Student Council meeting	1	2	3	4	5
f. Contributing ideas and views to the Student Council discussions	1	2	3	4	5
g. Voting and making the decisions at Student Council meetings	1	2	3	4	5
h. Implementing the agreed Student Council actions	1	2	3	4	5
i. Making sure that others complete their action commitments	1	2	3	4	5
j. Reporting and representing Student Council decisions to the Principal and staff	1	2	3	4	5

Recording and analysing results:

Find the average score in each of the 10 areas for students and for teachers:

<i>Area</i>	<i>Average score by students</i>	<i>Average score by teachers</i>	<i>Comments</i>
a: Organising meeting			
b: Setting agenda			
c: Chairing meeting			
d: Taking minutes			
e: Providing information			
f: Contributing ideas			
g: Voting and making decisions			
h: Implementing action			
i: Chasing up people			
j: Reporting decisions			

Discussion:

Possible actions to make the SRC more student-run:

-
-
-

Meaningful Student Involvement in the USA and Canada

Around the world there is a growing movement of students, educators, and community partners who are advocating for new roles for students throughout the education system. These roles reposition young people from being the passive recipients of adult-driven schools towards becoming active partners in learning and leadership throughout society. As I became deeply entrenched in this effort almost 10 years ago, I came across Roger Holdsworth and **Connect** magazine, and was extremely excited and inspired by what I found happening in Australia. It's 2010 now, and much has changed in this movement – including my enthusiasm for what is going on in Australia, and my admiration of Roger, both of which have only grown over time.

In that time I founded two projects designed to synthesise and promote two angles of the student participation movement. In 2001, immediately after the September 11th attacks, I created **The Freechild Project** to celebrate and connect young people who were positively engaging in social change around the world. Building a massive online database of examples and tools at www.freechild.org, and despite the Project being resource-starved and funding-poor, young people, youth workers, educators, and parents around the world quickly embraced **Freechild**.

However, I quickly discovered that the website's name and focus appeared too radical for more mainstream educators. At the same time I was working for the Washington

State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction as their first-ever student engagement specialist. After my position in the agency ended in 2003, I launched **SoundOut**, a consulting group focused on engaging students as partners in school change. With the support of a philanthropic foundation in Seattle, I published several booklets over the following years, and built a comprehensive website at www.soundout.org. Since those early years I have worked with thousands of children, young people, and adults in hundreds of youth-serving community-based organisations and K-12 schools in communities across the United States and Canada, promoting the need for our society to transform the roles of young people throughout society, particularly in schools.

It is through this advocacy that I have come to partner with and know many organisations, researchers, students, teachers, school leaders, foundations, and government agencies that are actively doing the same work. In my graduate work focused on educational leadership and policy studies, I also studied the broad base of international research and literature supporting student participation. It is from this background that I am excited to tell you about the well-being of the movement for student participation in schools in North America.

Student participation in schools takes many forms in the US and Canada. My research has shown me that students are actively engaged as planners, researchers, teachers and trainers, evaluators, decision-makers, and advocates throughout education. Teachers across the continent are employing practical techniques for student participation, including participatory action research, peer education, self/class/teacher evaluations, and community-organising activities designed to improve education. Many use the methodology of service learning, which combines classroom learning with meaningful service. In this work students are often the drivers of classroom activities and school improvement projects, with teachers facilitating to ensure students are meeting the rigours of the learning standards that schools are held accountable for across the US and Canada.

In a growing number of Canadian provinces, government education agencies are using both the impetus



of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and a groundswell of grassroots support to advocate for meaningful student involvement in provincial operations. Throughout 2010 I have worked with the staff of Alberta Education's **Student Engagement Team** to help create a powerful and sustainable future for their **Speak Out Initiative** (www.speakout.alberta.ca). In addition to providing ongoing consultation in their project redesign efforts, I have also trained several staff in their agency about my **Frameworks for Meaningful Student Involvement** (www.soundout.org/frameworks.html). Other provinces are following Alberta's lead as they reconsider their initial attempts at listening to student voice: with students patiently demanding accountability and officials looking for results, it has become imperative to demonstrate that actively, powerfully engaging students as partners in school improvement is an effective way to conduct the education system. Meaningful student involvement can show that.

Student participation is getting more popular across the United States, too. The federal **Department of Education** is conducting a 'Listening Tour' across the country, with several sessions exclusively for students to talk about their thoughts regarding schools. Several state education agencies have started student participation programs, including Kentucky, Washington, and Massachusetts; school districts in large cities are doing the same, with work in



Boston, Portland Oregon, Washington DC and Denver. However, aside from a few exceptional circumstances, it is hard to see the sustainable and deep impact students are having in these situations. Devoid of direct classroom connections, I have found that students often leave these activities with only anecdotes, rather than substantive learning. Without the authority to change schools, students and adults cannot show how students change schools in lasting ways. School support organisations are increasingly stepping up to compensate for the inadequate or indifferent perspective of many schools. In Oakland, California, a local community-based organisation called **Kids First** engaged students in creating a report card for area schools to methodically identify what students thought about their schools, and to report their findings back to their community and education leaders (<http://bit.ly/aFtJKM>). The **National PTA** recently contracted with me to create and pilot a program designed to engage students as education

policy advocates who will partner with adults in their state chapters to improve schools.

All of this shows that, while student participation is growing here in North America, there is a fine line emerging in the sands of time: in order to be effective for students, for the schools they attend, and for the education systems they are part of, student participation must have an impact. The state of the movement for student participation in Canada and the US illustrates that, while we are making strides towards making student participation broader, we still have yet to make it deeper. Meaningful student involvement is one way to take it there; examples from Australia can show schools in North America how that actually happens. Thank you for leading the way!

I can be contacted at adam@soundout.org or by calling +1 (360) 489-9680, or on Skype as **bicyclingfish**. Learn more about my work at www.adamfletcher.net

Adam Fletcher



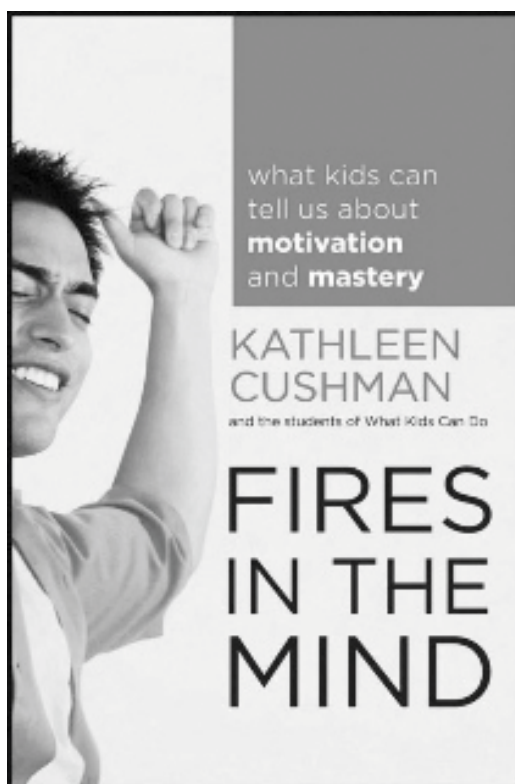
An innovative way to educate teachers: Listen to students

The spotlight in school reform has turned to teacher education. Some reformers believe that tightly scripted curriculum is the best defence against inadequately prepared teachers. Some prescribe specific behaviors without which even well educated teachers cannot be effective in classrooms. Some focus on combating underlying societal problems like poverty and discrimination.

Into that mix, a US non-profit organisation called **What Kids Can Do, Inc.** has been focusing on a fresh approach: listening to the voices and visions of students themselves. Since 2001, its website – www.WhatKidsCanDo.org – has documented young people's lives, learning and work for an audience of educators, policymakers, and the media. **WKCD** also collaborates with young people worldwide on books, curricula and research to expand current views about what constitutes challenging learning and achievement.

The most recent of these is ***Fires in the Mind: What Kids Can Tell Us About Motivation and Mastery*** (Jossey-Bass, 2010), a book that began as a **WKCD** initiative with support from MetLife Foundation. Written by Kathleen Cushman, the collaborative research project, involving 160 diverse urban and rural adolescent young people from around the United States, centred on the question: "What does it take to get really good at something?"

Starting with what they already did well—both in school and out—the young people analysed their learning process through the lens of research on motivation, deliberate practice, mastery and flow. They compared notes with adult experts about what habits result in high performance. Then, with Cushman, they analysed



the implications of the 'expert process' for the work that goes on in schools. A continuing dialogue about the subject takes place on the blog www.firesinthemind.org

Fires in the Mind is the latest in a series of books that **What Kids Can Do** has developed with student collaborators, bringing youth perspectives to educators of adolescents.

Fires in the Bathroom (The New Press, 2003, 2005) offers students' 'advice for teachers' about secondary school classroom culture. Before **WKCD** writer Kathleen Cushman began that research, she asked new

teachers what they wished they could ask the students they faced in urban classrooms. Young people gave their answers in chapters like ***Knowing Students Well*** and ***Respect, Liking, Trust, and Fairness***. Later, in ***Fires in the Middle School Bathroom*** (The New Press, 2008) Cushman and co-author Laura Rogers organised the responses of young adolescent students into chapters like ***Everything Is Off Balance*** and ***A Teacher on Our Side***.

In ***Sent to the Principal*** (Next Generation Press, 2005), high school students turned to matters that school principals usually control, such as dress codes, discipline, and school climate.

Two more books from **What Kids Can Do** offer advice from first-generation-college students for other low-income young people who aspire to higher education. ***First in the Family: Your High School Years*** deals with getting into university, and ***First in the Family: Your College Years*** addresses making it through to graduation (Next Generation Press, 2005, 2006).

Kathleen Cushman



Clearinghouse

Local and Overseas Publications Received



Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can't lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us on:
(03) 9489 9052 or (03) 8344 9637

Australian:

FYA Newsletter (Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne, Vic) *Issue 2, 2010*

Parents Voice (Parents Victoria Inc., Brunswick, Vic) *Vol 37 Issue 3; June 2010*

Research Developments (ACER, Camberwell, Vic) *No 23; Winter, 2010*

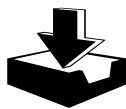
Research eLert (DEECD, Melbourne, Vic) *July/August, 2010*

Student Advocate (VicSRC, Melbourne, Vic) *Vol 4 No 3: July 2010*

TLN Journal: The Time is Now: An Australian Curriculum (Teacher Learning Network, Abbotsford, Vic) *Vol 17 No 2; Winter, 2010*

YAPRap (YAPA, Surry Hills, NSW) *August-September 2010*

Youth Studies Australia (ACYS, Hobart, Tas) *Vol 29 No 2; June 2010*



Documents

The documents listed in this column may be of general background interest. You may be able to find these on-line or a photocopy could be made available for research purposes. Please order by code number.

A full, computerised index of these documents is now available from **Connect** for \$3; this can be accessed and printed by topic, key-word etc or simply sequentially.

Code Description/Pages/Cost

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